

Drawing Relief in the Transition from Teacher Support and Inclusive Practices: Perceptions of Transfer Students from Private to Public School

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Abstract

Transfer students experience low coping during transition. In this study, I explored students' perceptions of their school transition experiences. I used a qualitative descriptive design, interviewed 13 participants whom I selected through purposive sampling, and analyzed the data using thematic analysis. Consequently, I found that students faced difficulties, including larger class sizes, limited resources, and diverse social environments. Despite this, they demonstrated resilience by seeking peer support, adjusting study habits, and rebuilding confidence. Teacher support and inclusive practices also played a key role in easing their transition. I proposed that future studies may use the identified themes and subthemes to develop quantitative instruments through Exploratory Factor Analysis and apply Student Adjustment Theory to examine the academic, social, and emotional adaptation and coping strategies of transfer students in public-school settings.

Keywords: Drawing relief in the transition, teacher support, inclusive practices, perceptions of transfer students, private to public schools

1. Introduction

The transition of students from private to public schools is a significant concern, particularly regarding their low coping. In the United Kingdom, Foster et al. (2020) reported that transfer students experienced low coping capacity during the early stages of transition. This was largely due to unfamiliar academic systems and limited institutional support, which made adjustment more difficult.

In Italy, Valenti and Faraci (2021) emphasized that ineffective coping strategies are strongly associated with poor academic and social adjustment. Students with weak coping mechanisms were more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and difficulty adapting to new environments.

In the Philippines, several studies have highlighted the challenges students face when transitioning to new academic settings. Deocades et al. (2025), in their study conducted in West Visayas, found that students experienced low coping levels due to emotional stress, financial difficulties, and environmental adjustments. These challenges are similar to those encountered by transfer students who must adapt to new academic and social environments.

Moreover, Santiago and Paglinawan (2025) emphasized that transitioning to a new institution often leads to difficulty in rebuilding social connections and adjusting to unfamiliar systems. Although their study focused on teachers, the findings are applicable to students, particularly transferees, who face similar adjustment pressures.

Similarly, in Cagayan de Oro City, Lualhati and Magno (2020) reported that students encountered emotional stress and low coping capacity, particularly when adjusting to new peer groups and academic expectations. The study emphasized that the lack of support systems contributed to students' inability to cope effectively.

In General Santos City, Dela Cruz and Torres (2022) found that students who experienced transitions between schools reported feelings of anxiety, isolation, and reduced self-confidence, indicating low coping levels. This suggests that school transitions can significantly disrupt students' emotional well-being and social adjustment.

This study focused on Junior High School (JHS) students who transferred from public to private schools, a group whose adjustment challenges remain underexplored. While prior research has examined general school adjustment, limited studies have addressed the specific experiences of JHS transferees. Thus, this study aimed to fill this gap by examining their academic, social, and emotional difficulties.

1.1. Significance of the Study

This study may be relevant to Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities), as it promotes inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. Examining the academic adjustment of private-school students transferring to public schools highlights the challenges they face in adapting to new academic environments. The findings may help students, teachers, administrators, and parents provide appropriate support. Additionally, the study aligns with Holy Cross of Davao College's mission of holistic formation and contributes to the social sciences by deepening the understanding of student adaptation, identity, and educational inequality.

1.2. Research Questions

In this study, I explored the perceptions of JHS students who transferred from private to public schools. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the students on their situation or the nature of the change from studying in a private to a public school?
2. What are the perceptions of the students on their personal characteristics and resilience in adapting to the transition?
3. What are the perceptions of the students on the support they needed or received during the transition?
4. What are the perceptions of the students on their strategies to cope with the transition?

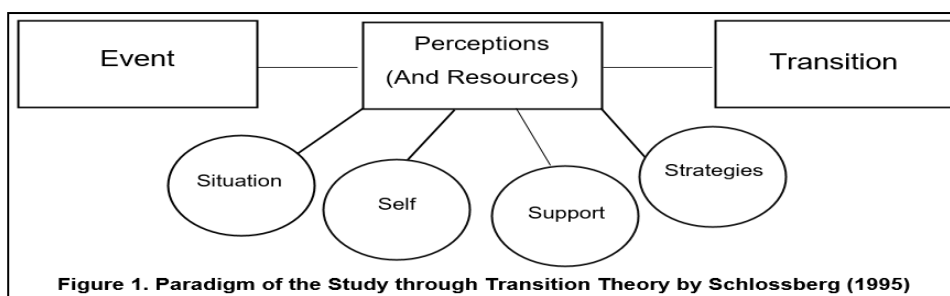
1.3. Assumptions

I assumed that the lived experiences of junior high school students transferring from private to public schools are shaped by both personal and shared realities, particularly in terms of academic adjustment, coping strategies, and sense of belonging. These students transfer to seek better opportunities and support as they face

challenges in adapting to a new environment. Their previous schooling, new expectations, and relationships with peers and teachers influence their identity as learners. I further assumed that their experiences would provide insights that may deepen understanding of student adaptation and adjustment.

1.4. Conceptual Framework

I anchored this study on Transition Theory by Schlossberg (1995). Such a theory posits that a transition is not simply the event itself, but a process of adaptation, and that the impact of any change depends largely on how a person perceives it and the resources they have to manage it. Schlossberg highlights this through the “4 S System,” which includes situation (the nature of the change), self (personal characteristics and resilience), support (available social resources), and strategies (coping responses).



2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative descriptive research approach to explore the perceptions of students transitioning from private to public schools. This design was appropriate for capturing participants' subjective experiences and for presenting findings in their own words (Bradshaw et al., 2017), allowing a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions.

2.2 Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in a public school in Davao City that accommodates students transferring from private schools. It the students transition as they faced new academic expectations, social dynamics, and cultural practices. The study explored their challenges, adjustments, and coping mechanisms as they adapted to the public-school environment, offering insights into their experiences during the transition.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study involved 13 students aged at least 17 years old who transferred from private to public schools. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their prior private school experience,

current public-school enrollment, and willingness to provide consent. This sample size aligns with qualitative research recommendations for in-depth exploration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

2.4 Data Gathering Procedures

For this qualitative study, the researcher obtained approval from the Graduate School Dean and complied with the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) requirements before coordinating with the public-school administration to interview Junior High School student-transferees. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven participants and focus group discussions with six participants to capture both individual and shared experiences of academic, social, and emotional transitions. In-depth interviews explored personal narratives, while FGDs examined collective experiences and coping strategies (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Informed consent was obtained, and sessions were conducted in a quiet, accessible school setting using a validated interview guide with audio recordings to ensure accuracy and data integrity.

2.5 Data Analysis

I analyzed the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups using thematic analysis, an organized method for identifying patterns and themes in transcripts (Caulfield, 2023). Guided by the study's qualitative descriptive research design, I focused on the participants' accounts to highlight their shared experiences.

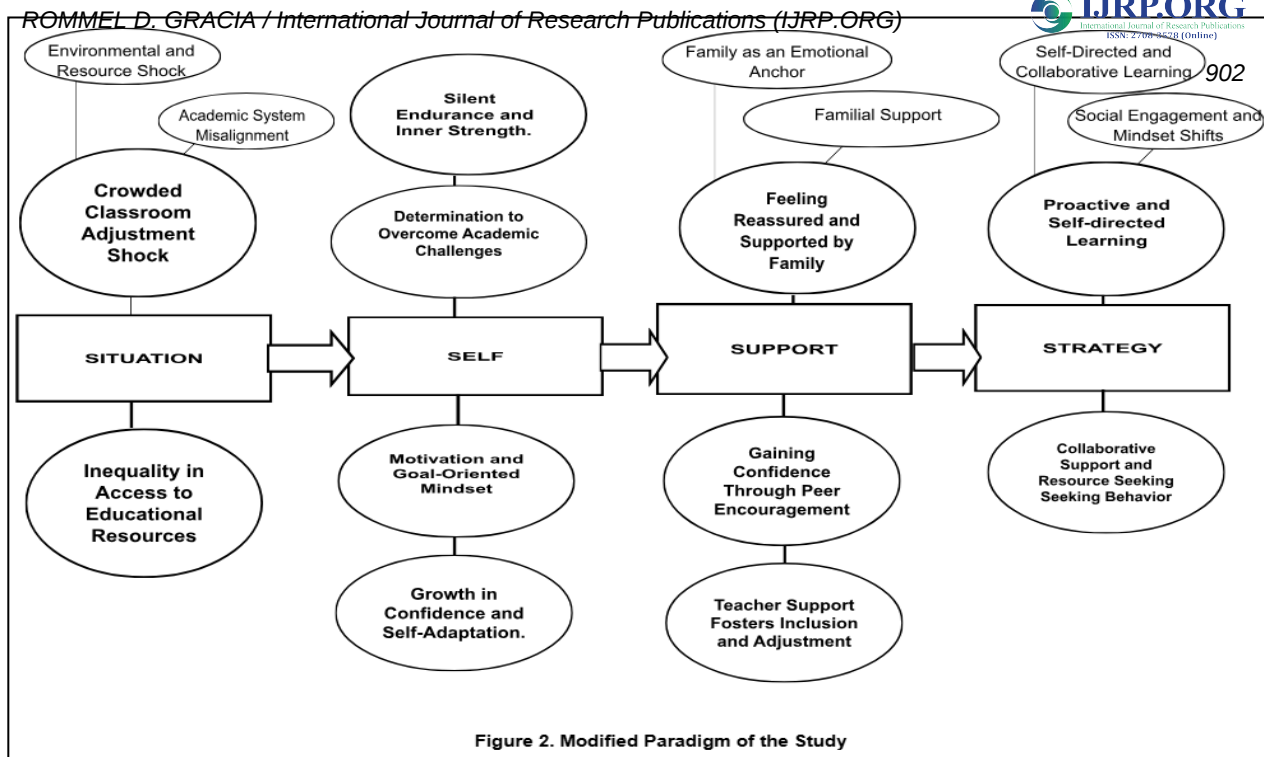
2.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

In this descriptive study, I ensured the results were reliable and trustworthy. To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative descriptive study, I applied the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, following the framework outlined by Sirwan (2024). These criteria helped guarantee that the findings were both reliable and meaningful.

3. Results

In this chapter, I presented the experiences of junior high school students who transferred from private to public schools based on their responses, and I integrated the modified paradigm into the study's original theoretical concepts using the identified themes and subthemes.

The modified paradigm explains junior high school students' perceptions of transferring from private to public schools, focusing on transition, adjustment, and identity formation. Grounded in Schlossberg's Transition Theory, it highlights the interaction of Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies, and frames the transfer as a life transition shaped by family, resources, social adaptation, and personal goals.



Perceptions of the students on their situation or the nature of the change from studying in a private to a public school

Participants reported challenges transitioning from private to public schools, especially in adapting to new learning conditions, with two subthemes identified: classroom crowding and adjustment shock, and unequal access to educational resources.

On Crowded Classroom Adjustment Shock. Several participants described their initial experience in public school classrooms as overwhelming, noting that overcrowding, limited seating, and uncomfortable conditions affected their ability to concentrate. One participant recalled her experience upon entering the classroom, sharing:

“When I entered the classroom, I was really shocked because there were so many of us. There were not enough chairs, some were even broken, and it was very hot. It was very hard to focus because it was noisy and crowded.” IDI-P5

I felt a quiet ache as the participant described entering an overcrowded classroom with broken chairs, heat, and constant noise, where focusing became a struggle. It showed how learning meant enduring a difficult environment that demanded much while offering little in return. Another participant emphasized the emotional impact of the physical setting, saying:

“In public school, the classrooms are very different, and the facilities are limited compared to private schools. It was quite challenging at the start, but I learned to focus on learning even if the surroundings were simple.” IDI-P5

As I listened, I sensed that the differences between private and public-school environments made the transition difficult. Limited facilities compounded the challenge, but what stood out was the participant’s

growth. Over time, they shifted their focus from what was lacking in their learning and realized that their education could continue even in a simple environment. One of the participants shared:

“I experienced culture shock because of the large number of students. In my private school, we were only around 20 in a class, but when I transferred to a public school, it increased to about 50–60 students, making the classroom feel quite crowded.” IDI-P2

The participant described moving from a class of twenty to a room of fifty to sixty, feeling lost in the crowd and finding adjustment and belonging more challenging.

On Inequality in Access to Educational Resources. The participants shared experiences showing how unequal access to learning materials affected their education, highlighting both financial challenges and emotional impacts. One participant described her struggles:

“I noticed that in private schools, each student can buy their own books and have their own copy. But in public schools, there are books, yet they are already very old, torn, and covered with dust. They are just piled up in the rooms, and students simply get them and share them across sections. Because they are shared, there are instances when the books get torn.” IDI-P3

Hearing this, I felt empathy for the hidden struggles in something as simple as a textbook. One participant described how private schools provided individual books, while public schools relied on old, shared, worn materials. I could imagine the difficulty of learning from limited resources, yet the participant still persevered, saying:

“If you don’t have a book, you just borrow one. Sometimes I feel shy to ask because many of us need it, and we are all in the same situation.” FGD-P5

Students often have to borrow limited books, sometimes feeling embarrassed due to the high demand and sharing. It was about books and about navigating pride, need, and patience in learning. A participant shared:

“It’s really difficult for us because we’re always given worksheets, and we have to pay for them. Some of my classmates don’t have much allowance, so it’s really hard for them since we need to pay for worksheets, and there are also worksheets for other subjects. So, it’s really tough not having books.” IDI-P2

Hearing this, I felt deep compassion for their daily challenges. The participant shared that required-paid worksheets and a lack of books made it difficult for some students to keep up, especially when multiple subjects were involved. I could sense how these small but persistent barriers affected not only learning but also their dignity, effort, and resilience.

Perceptions of the students on their personal characteristics and resilience in adapting to the transition

Participants described their transition as marked by silence, shyness, and internal struggles, reflecting quiet resilience as they adjusted to a new environment.

On Silent Endurance and Inner Strength. Participants described their transition as marked by silence, shyness, and internal struggles often withdrawing due to embarrassment and uncertainty, yet reflecting quiet resilience as they gradually adjusted to a new academic and social environment. As shared by one participant:

“My mindset before was just to stay quiet because I felt shy.” FGD-P2

Their silence reflected fear of judgment and a protective response to an unfamiliar environment, yet also quiet resilience in their ability to endure and observe. Strength is shown by continuing despite discomfort. Another participant expressed:

“I just wore a face mask and stayed on the side.” IDI-P7

As I reflected, I saw participants create a sense of safety in an overwhelming space. Staying on the side reflected both fear and coping a quiet determination to remain despite discomfort. Their resilience began with small, protective actions supporting gradual adjustment.

On Determination to Overcome Academic Challenges. Participants demonstrated resilience by persisting in handling heavier academic demands, including increased workloads and difficult subjects. Despite feeling overwhelmed, they continued to meet expectations. As one participant shared:

“Sometimes I stay up late just to finish my activities. There are so many tasks.” IDI-P5

Listening to this, I recognized the participant’s determination to keep up despite exhaustion. Despite long hours and a heavy workload, they persevered, demonstrating strong responsibility and resilience by pushing through fatigue to meet academic demands. As shared by one participant:

“I can really do it.” FGD-P6

This statement reflected strong self-belief. Despite challenges, the participant remained confident, using this mindset as a strength to face difficulties. This showed resilience reinforced by belief in overcoming obstacles.

On Motivation and Goal-Oriented Mindset. Participants’ resilience was driven by strong motivations and clear goals, especially their desire to succeed for their families, which helped them endure hardships and stay focused on their academic journey. A participant shared:

“My motivation is my family. I want to become an honor student to make them happy.” IDI-P7

Hearing this, I felt how deeply the participant’s actions were rooted in love and responsibility. Their desire to make their family proud became a source of strength, giving meaning to their struggles and reflecting a resilience driven by purpose. Another participant shared:

“If there are challenges, we should become winners; we should become champions.” FGD-P5

This reflected a competitive, determined mindset that sees challenges as opportunities rather than barriers, thereby strengthening resilience through confidence and ambition. Such a perspective also encourages persistence and adaptability, enabling individuals to navigate difficulties more effectively and sustain long-term personal growth.

On Growth in Confidence and Self-Adaptation. Over time, participants showed significant personal growth as they adapted to their new environment, gradually shifting from being shy and withdrawn to becoming more confident, socially engaged, and self-assured. This transformation reflects resilience as a process of continuous development and self-improvement. As one participant reflected:

“Now, I am no longer afraid. I am more confident, and I no longer second-guess myself.” FGD-P4

Listening to this, I witnessed a powerful shift in their self-perception, as fear and hesitation gave way to confidence and certainty. Through continuous exposure and effort, they are able to rebuild their sense of self, reflecting resilience as growth, where challenges become stepping stones toward greater strength. Another participant shared:

“I realized I really can do it.” FGD-P1

As I reflected on this realization, I saw how the participant developed a deeper understanding of their own capabilities. This moment of self-awareness marked a turning point, when doubt gave way to belief. It highlights that resilience is not only about surviving difficulties but also about discovering one's strength through them.

Perceptions of the students on the support they needed or received during the transition

Participants' experiences showed that support systems played a vital role in easing their transition to a public school by improving their emotional well-being and academic adjustment. I identified three subthemes: family support provided reassurance, peer encouragement built confidence, and teacher support fostered inclusion and adjustment.

On Feeling Reassured and Supported by Family. Family support played a crucial role in helping participants navigate academic and emotional challenges during their transition, providing reassurance, encouragement, and stability amid adjustment and uncertainty. One participant shared:

“My family helps me through financial and emotional support. With the struggles I face in public school, it is really hard to adjust, but they are always there for me. They tell me it is okay even if I don't become an honor student or if my grades drop, because adjusting is really difficult. They remind me that I can still do better in college, where my skills will truly show. They also support me by providing baon, helping with project contributions, and other needs.” FGD-P4

Listening to this, I felt a strong sense of reassurance from the participant's family, whose emotional support eased the challenges of transitioning to public school and reinforced hope, motivation, and belief in their ability to persevere. One participant expressed:

“During this transition, I realized that my family played a very big role in my adjustment. They gave advice, encouragement, and practical help, such as checking my homework and encouraging me to participate in school activities. When I felt down because of the crowded, busy schedule at public school, they became my source of motivation. Their support helped me become more positive and

confident in the new environment.” IDI-P6

Listening to this, I recognized how central the family was in the participant’s adjustment, providing guidance, encouragement, and active support with school tasks that strengthened motivation, confidence, and coping during the transition. Another participant mentioned:

“Emotional and physical support from my family. Emotionally, my mother comforts me, and physically, they support me so that I can move on from my past school year.” IDI-P1

Listening to this, I felt the warmth of family support, where emotional, physical, and financial assistance fostered security, healing, and a positive mindset. Overall, the narratives show that strong family support was vital in helping participants cope with stress, stay motivated, and adapt to their new school environment.

On Gaining Confidence through Peer Encouragement. This theme highlights how peer relationships helped participants gain confidence and adjust to their new academic environment, with classmates serving as an immediate source of support in the classroom. One participant shared:

“I have classmates who help me when I do not understand the lesson. They share their notes and explain them again to me.” IDI-P1

Listening to this, I sensed the importance of peer support, where classmates provided help by sharing notes and explaining lessons, creating a supportive environment that eased academic challenges and reduced feelings of isolation. Similarly, another participant expressed:

“When I already had friends in the class, I was no longer as shy, and I felt more comfortable going to school.” IDI-P2

Listening to this, I sensed how friendships eased the participant’s discomfort, reducing shyness and turning fear into comfort, which encouraged more confident engagement. Behind these words was a growing sense of belonging, where simple social bonds made adjustment easier in their new setting. Another participant expressed:

“They helped me feel like I belonged by talking to me and making sure I felt included, like inviting me to join them in the canteen.” FGD-P4

Listening to this, I felt how small gestures of inclusion created a sense of belonging, turning unfamiliar spaces into more comfortable and welcoming environments. Overall, the narratives show that peer encouragement through friendship, support, and inclusion helped participants feel more confident and adjust more easily to their new school setting, enhancing their emotional well-being.

On Teacher Support Fosters Inclusion and Adjustment. This theme highlights how teacher support played a crucial role in helping participants feel included and adjust to their new academic environment, serving as a reliable source of guidance, reassurance, and both academic and emotional support. One participant shared:

“With my close teachers, whenever I struggled, they would help me and answer my questions, and they made me feel included by treating me fairly alongside long-standing students.” IDI-P3

Listening to this, I sensed participants’ appreciation for teachers’ consistent support and fairness, which provided comfort and reassurance that they were not alone in facing academic challenges and adjustment. Another participant stated:

“My close teachers supported me, knowing I was a transferee. They encouraged me that I could manage despite the differences between private and public schools. Whenever they had questions, they would call me to participate.” IDI-P5

Teacher support went beyond academics, as encouragement, inclusion, and engagement helped transferee students build confidence, feel valued, and develop a sense of belonging. Overall, fair treatment and guidance from teachers eased adjustment, supported social integration, and strengthened emotional resilience in a positive learning environment.

Perceptions of the students on their strategies to cope with the transition

Participants’ experiences revealed coping strategies in adjusting to a new academic environment, resulting to two subthemes: taking extra steps to understand lessons and learning through shared effort.

On Proactive and Self-Directed Learning. This theme highlights the coping strategies participants used to manage academic demands in their new school environment, including taking extra steps beyond classroom instruction to better understand their lessons. One participant shared:

“I really did self-study because not everything is discussed in class. I read the lessons in advance so I can understand them.” FGD-P4

Listening to this, I sensed the participant’s determination and resilience as they took the initiative to self-study and prepare in advance, showing a strong commitment to learning and building confidence over time. Another participant described:

“When I find the lessons difficult, I ask for notes from my friends because I do not want to be left behind.” IDI-P3

Listening to this, I sensed determination shaped by vulnerability and drive, as the participant sought notes from friends not only to catch up but also to stay on track, showing humility, resilience, and a reliance on peer support for reassurance. Similarly, another participant shared:

“To catch up, I reviewed my lessons at home, joined study groups with friends, and asked questions to teachers. Slowly, I learned how to manage my workload and became more self-reliant in learning.” IDI-P4

Listening to this, I saw growth shaped by persistence, as the participant used self-study, study groups, and questions to actively stay up to date and gradually become more independent. Overall, the narratives show that adjustment required proactive learning through self-study, peer collaboration, and teacher guidance, helping participants cope and develop independence.

On Collaborative Support and Resource-Seeking Behavior. This theme reflects how peer collaboration helped participants manage academic challenges in their new school environment, supporting both academic progress and a sense of connection with classmates. One participant shared:

“We helped each other with our assignments and reviews because we were all experiencing difficulties.” IDI-P4

Listening to this, I felt shared struggle turning into collective strength, as participants helped each other with assignments and reviewers, transforming learning into mutual support that made challenges more manageable. Similarly, another participant emphasized:

“I have classmates who help me when I do not understand the lesson. They share their notes and explain them again to me.” IDI-P1

Listening to this, I felt reassured by supportive peers as classmates shared notes and explanations, creating a cooperative, encouraging learning environment that helped reduce confusion and build confidence. Another participant described her experience, saying:

“Yes, I actually have a circle of friends who encourage me to study and review together. They are also a good influence on me.” FGD-P5

Listening to this, I felt comfort in positive peer influence, as supportive friends encouraged studying and reviewing, fostering motivation, better habits, and shared growth. Overall, the narratives show that collaborative learning eased academic adjustment by improving understanding, strengthening social connections, and fostering a sense of belonging in the classroom.

4. Discussions

This chapter presents the emerging themes and subthemes from my conversations with the participants, along with implications for practice, interventions, future research directions, and related literature that supports the findings.

Students Perceived the Transition as Challenging.

My findings illuminate the multifaceted challenges students encounter when transitioning into new academic environments. Narratives from participants revealed that adapting to unfamiliar learning systems, increased academic expectations, and social adjustments often create feelings of uncertainty and stress. These transitional difficulties shape not only their academic engagement but also their emotional well-being, as students struggle to find stability in a new setting. Many participants reported that abrupt changes in routines and expectations made the transition particularly overwhelming, affecting their confidence and performance.

This finding aligns with the study by Anderson and Jiang (2021), which found that academic transitions often lead to heightened stress due to increased demands and reduced familiarity with support structures. Similarly, Smith et al. (2022) emphasized that students frequently perceive transitions as disruptive, particularly when institutional guidance is limited. However, I disagreed with Lee's (2020) findings, which suggested that most students adapt quickly with minimal difficulty, as my participants consistently described prolonged adjustment periods and persistent challenges.

Students perceived unequal access to resources.

My findings illuminate the disparities in students' access to essential academic resources, including technology, learning materials, and supportive learning environments. Participants highlighted that such inequalities significantly hinder their ability to fully engage in academic tasks, thereby widening performance gaps among peers. Limited access to stable internet connections, appropriate study spaces, and instructional support were commonly cited as barriers that shaped their academic experiences and outcomes.

This finding aligns with García and Weiss (2020), who reported that unequal access to educational resources exacerbates academic inequalities, particularly among marginalized students. Likewise, UNESCO (2021) emphasized that disparities in digital access became more pronounced in recent years, affecting students' learning continuity. However, I opposed Brown's (2022) perspective, which argued that institutional interventions have sufficiently minimized resource gaps, as my findings demonstrate that inequalities persist and continue to disadvantage many students.

Students perceived adjustment as a gradual build-up of resilience.

My findings illuminate that students' adjustment is not immediate but rather a gradual process characterized by the development of resilience. Participants described how initial struggles eventually contributed to personal growth, adaptability, and improved coping mechanisms. Over time, students learned to navigate academic demands, manage stress, and build confidence in their abilities, demonstrating that resilience emerges through continuous exposure to challenges.

This finding supports Zimmerman (2021), who highlighted that resilience develops progressively as individuals encounter and overcome adversities. Similarly, Martin et al. (2023) found that students who experience initial academic difficulties often develop stronger coping strategies over time. However, I opposed Clark's (2020) claim that resilience is largely an innate trait, as my findings suggest it is cultivated through experience rather than being solely innate.

Students perceived strong support systems as crucial.

My findings illuminate the critical role of strong support systems in facilitating students' successful adjustment and overall well-being. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of family encouragement, peer networks, and institutional support in navigating academic and personal challenges.

These support systems provided emotional reassurance, academic guidance, and motivation, enabling students to persevere despite difficulties. This finding corroborates the study of Johnson and Rivera (2022), who found that supportive relationships significantly enhance students' academic persistence and psychological well-being. Similarly, the OECD (2021) reported that students with strong support networks are more likely to succeed academically and adapt effectively to change. However, I opposed Davis's (2020) argument that student success is primarily driven by individual effort, as my findings clearly demonstrate that external support plays an equally vital role in student achievement.

Implications for Practice

My study on transfer students moving from private to public schools highlights how their adjustment, adaptation, and social integration influence their academic and personal development, underscoring the need for structured support programs, such as orientation sessions, peer mentoring, and guidance services, to ease their transition into a new school environment. Aligned with UNESCO's goals of promoting inclusive and equitable education, the study underscores the importance of creating supportive learning environments where teachers and school administrators foster participation, collaboration, and a sense of belonging among transfer students. Overall, the findings suggest that targeted support systems and

responsive teaching strategies may help transfer students adapt successfully, build confidence, and achieve positive educational outcomes.

Future Directions

Future research may use quantitative methods to examine academic adjustment, social integration, emotional adaptation, sense of belonging, and self-confidence as variables, with subthemes serving as indicators for measurement tools. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) can help develop and validate questionnaires for broader data collection, while Student Adjustment Theory may further explain how transfer students adapt to differences in school culture, teaching styles, peer relationships, and academic expectations.

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